

Subspecies of the Red Knot *Calidris canutus* in the extreme north-western Canadian arctic islands

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Cramp & Simmons (1983) pointed out that it is unknown which subspecies of the Red Knot *Calidris canutus* breeds in that part of the Canadian Arctic north of Melville and Bathurst Islands. Accordingly I have examined pertinent specimen material in the Canadian Museum of Nature (formerly the National Museum of Canada) from the following localities: Ellef Ringnes Island (Isachsen, 10 adults); Melville Island (Winter Harbour, 2 adults); and Prince Patrick Island (Mould Bay, 2 adults and 2 short-winged young assuming juvenile plumage, progeny of one of the adults).

The 14 adults are fairly uniform. They compare well in colour and size with a good series of breeding birds from Ellesmere and Axel Heiberg Islands. They are short billed (averages: males 30.7 mm; females 33.0 mm). Because there is considerable sexual dimorphism in the Knot, specimens were compared only with others of the same sex. In colouration the rufous of the under-parts in all specimens extends posteriorly over the lower abdomen and onto the undertail coverts. The specimens agree with the Ellesmere Island series also in the colouration of the upper-parts, which show no tendency whatever to *rufa* or *rogersi*. The two juveniles from Prince Patrick Island are readily separable from *rufa* by the darker colouration of the feather margins of the back, thus being like comparable birds from Ellesmere Island.

Roselaar (1983) has separated the northern Nearctic population of the Red Knot as *Calidris canutus islandica* (Linnaeus) from the nominate *C. c. canutus*. I follow him in calling the northern Nearctic birds *islandica* with the reservation that I have not personally confirmed the validity of *islandica* because an adequate series of Siberian-breeding specimens is not available to me.

Thus *islandica* is the breeding subspecies from northern Greenland westwards across the northernmost arctic islands of Canada to and including Prince Patrick Island. MacDonald (1954) stated that the Red Knot was 'quite rare' on Prince Patrick Island. No one, to my knowledge, has yet found it breeding on Banks Island.

The race *islandica* is known to breed south as far as southern Melville, Bathurst, and Devon Islands. It has been assumed by some that all Red Knots breeding south of 75°N are probably *rufa*. There is evidence, however, that some *islandica* also nest somewhat south of 75°N. On Prince of Wales Island in 1958, Manning & Macpherson (1961) collected an adult male at the mouth of the Dolphin River on 9 June and a juvenile male at Cape Henry Kellet on 21 August. They observed another adult near Cape Brodie on 25 July which behaved as though it had a nest or young. They referred the two specimens collected to what was then considered the nominate race (now *islandica*). I recently examined the two specimens and agree with Manning & Macpherson in referring them unquestionably to *islandica*. The birds show no tendency to *rufa*. Indeed the rufous colouration of the adult is unusually extensive. Almost certainly these specimens are part of the breeding population of Prince of Wales Island, well south of 75°N.

Areas of intergradation between *islandica* and *rufa* are unknown at least to me. Breeding specimens from possible zones of contact between *islandica* and *rufa* are needed. Because the two forms are allohiemic, areas of breeding ground contact and intergradation may well be small - or even non-existent.

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